



THE BODEGA ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES, INC.

513 West 179 st. New York, N.Y. 10033

July 8, 2004

Chairman Michael K. Powell
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20554

RE: Docket No. 03-133

Dear Chairman Powell:

On behalf of the Bodega Association of the United States, I urge the Commission not to add new access charges and fees to pre-paid calling cards.

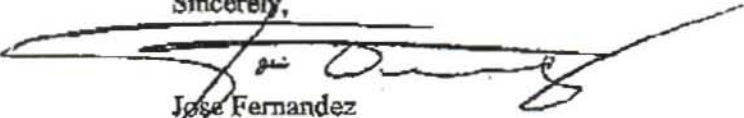
Pre-paid calling cards have served as a vital lifeline among members of the Latino and African-American communities, not just in New York City but also in communities nationwide, where over 40% of Latinos and over two-thirds of African Americans have used pre-paid cards. No one knows this better than *bodega* and convenience store owners, where approximately 20% of the nation's calling card users purchase their cards.

These cards are becoming more widespread because they are a low cost and convenient way to make telephone calls. As pre-paid calling cards become more popular, *bodega* owners see an increase in sales at the same time that consumers are saving money. On the other hand, adding access charges and other fees would lead to less demand for calling cards, fewer sales for *bodegas* and less communication amongst friends and family, especially among those for whom the phone is the only connection.

This last point should not be minimized. *Bodega* owners are often the hubs of activity in many minority communities. It is evident that for many people, particularly those with low incomes, pre-paid calling cards have become a crucial avenue for staying in touch with family, contacting employers, making doctor's appointments, and staying connected in ways that we often take for granted. The impact of a higher costs for pre-paid calling costs would be severe on those who rely so heavily on them.

Bodega owners have already faced the effects of sticker shock in 2004 with the increase in dairy prices and other consumer goods. The last thing our members need is for another popular item to become prohibitively priced - it's bad for sales and bad for consumers. I therefore urge the Commission to keep pre-paid calling cards affordable.

Sincerely,



Jose Fernandez
President

Bodega Association of the United States

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